

Canyon... of the Dammed (Upper Big Creek)

Rating: 3-C2 IV ****

Time: 10-12 hours

Season: Low: July-Sept Norm: Aug-Sept High: Aug-Sept

Number of Raps: 13

Longest Rap: ~195ft

Gear: 2x 200ft rope, 150ft webbing, 13 rapides, wetsuit, neoprene gloves, technical canyoneering gear

Rubber: At least 4mm/3mm. 5mm or more recommended under most conditions.

Hazards: Dam release canyon. Under normal conditions Southern California Edison conducts a summer long "Fish Release" into the canyon. This results in low flows in the canyon that are great for canyoneering. On occasion, Edison could conduct much higher releases. A check of the release schedule can be done by calling 559-893-3611 or by stopping by the Edison office in Big Creek. Raps in waterfalls, natural anchors, anchors in the watercourse. A solid understanding of class C canyoneering technique and good natural anchor skills are required.

Vehicle: Passenger car

Car Shuttle: About 4.5mi

Approach: 1mi

Exit: None

Good Eats: There are a number of restaurants around Shaver Lake that offer "provincial" cuisine. Beer, basic supplies and a mean ice cream sunday can be had at the general store in Shaver Lake as well.

Camping: So. Cal. Edison and the USFS operate a few campgrounds around Shaver Lake. There are also lots of dispersed camping options in the area.

Introduction:

Canyon... of the Dammed is an exciting canyoneering adventure that delivers a lot of bang for your buck.

The water in Canyon... of the Dammed flows through a beautiful granite gorge full of large and spectacular waterfalls and flanked by granite domes in classic Sierra style. The technical section in Canyon... of the Dammed is long and covers a lot of vertical relief. This makes for great fun for the experienced and well prepared. However, be warned the length of time that the canyoneer will be exposed to cold water and required to make decisions in technical terrain is long. Go prepared and with a strong team.

The water that flows through Canyon... of the Dammed is dam release from Huntington Lake immediately above the canyon. Southern California Edison controls the release of water from the lake. During the summer Edison is required to maintain a small flow in the canyon as a "fish release" to preserve habitat for the canyon's flora and fauna. During these fish releases is when you want to make your descent. Higher flows are not common in Canyon... of the Dammed during the summer months. However, it is possible to verify that no major release is scheduled by calling the So. Cal. Edison office in Big Creek at 559-893-3611 or stopping by. Their office in the Middle of Big Creek and can't be missed. Entering Canyon... of the Dammed under high flow conditions would be very dangerous.

During our descent in 2007 we found signs of previous passage in the canyon. Unfortunately most of what we

found was single zinc plated bolts. While some of the bolts in the canyon were necessary and adequately placed many were not. The worst example was a single bolt 4 feet below a massive tree that you could probably safely hang a pick-up truck off of. The bolt offered zero advantage over the tree. Please consider using natural anchors whenever possible in this and other canyons that you descend. If you must bolt, please use 3/8" or larger stainless steel hardware and place 2 bolts per anchor. Bolt anchors in canyons are subject to far too much moisture to not be stainless and redundant. It goes with out saying of course, that before placing any bolts please learn proper technique and practice in a controlled area. In Canyon... of the Dammed we removed webbing from unnecessary bolts, rigged natural anchors and added a second stainless bolt to all necessary bolt anchors. We hope you will descend Canyon... of the Dammed using natural anchors wherever possible. We think you will find it more enjoyable and it will contribute greatly to the long-term preservation of this wonderful canyon.

Driving Directions:

From the town of Shaver Lake on CA-168 travel north about 4.5 miles. Turn left on signed Big Creek Rd. and head towards Big Creek. After about 6.5 miles and just before reaching the town of Big Creek, Big Creek Rd. makes a nearly 180 degree turn to the left and passes over Big Creek. Just after the Bridge over Big Creek there is a pullout on the Left. This is the lower trailhead.



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To reach the upper trailhead, continue on Big Creek Rd. 0.6 miles through the town of Big Creek. At the Big Creek general store make a hairpin right turn to stay on Big Creek Rd.. After 1.5 miles make a right onto Huntington Lake Rd.. This turn is signed for Huntington Lake. After 1.8 miles make a right on Huntington Lodge Rd.. This turn is signed for "Camp Keola." Follow Huntington Lodge Rd. for 0.7 miles to a road closure gate immediately adjacent to Huntington Lake. Please park without blocking the gate as the Huntington Lake sheriff's house is farther down this road. This is the upper trailhead.

Approach:

Hike on the road past the road closure gate. You will first pass the sheriff's house. Afterwards veer right to follow the road below the Huntington Lake dam. The road will make a 180-degree u-turn below the dam and then intersect with a series of other roads. Continue straight on the main road noting a large Penstock on the Left. Soon the road crosses over this penstock so that it is immediately beside the road on the right. After crossing over the penstock continue on down the road. At the end of the road, where a "gate house" is indicated on the 7.5" map (see map) head north-east cross-country and downhill following a lateral ridge while generally staying in the woods. Eventually you'll intersect a gully. Follow the gully down to Big Creek just above the beginning of the technical section.

Canyon:

Get your wetsuit and gear on when you reach the watercourse and head downstream. You have reached the beginning of the technical section when the canyon funnels down into a dramatic "V" and appears to fall off the face of the earth.

Rap 1: 50 feet from a pinch in the MIDDLE of the watercourse slung with a long piece of webbing to reach the lip. This is a double drop. The first section has an awkward start over an overhung lip and is into the teeth of "inversion falls." It's all free hanging but you will quickly descend behind the falls. Hang your bag and try not to get inverted! This section of the rap deposits you in a dark hanging pool. Make your way to the exit spout of the pool and continue your rappel to the larger pool below. The landing in the bottom pool should be less than 5 feet deep. This rappel is really exciting and beautiful!

Continue down canyon through a short section of shallow "V" shaped slot to another shallow pool. At this point the watercourse continues down another section of steeper "V" slot that contains 6 foot to 8 foot falls. You bypass this section by climbing up onto

slabs on the RIGHT (LDC). Descend carefully over fairly steep slabs to rejoin the watercourse below the slot. Continue down canyon.

Rap 2: 120 feet from a pinch on the LEFT (LDC) among the rocks. This is a single drop that ends in a pool. Set the rope length or be prepared for a floating disconnect. Continue down canyon.

Rap 3: 70 feet from a small arch on the RIGHT (LDC). This is a double drop that goes first to a ledge then continues to a pool. Set the rope length or be prepared for a floating disconnect.

Rap 4: 40 feet from a tree on the RIGHT (LDC). This is a single drop.

Rap 5: 105 feet from a tree on the LEFT (LDC). This is a single drop down a lovely face and into a gorgeous pool. Set the rope length or be prepared for a floating disconnect. Continue down canyon.

Rap 6: 40 feet from a tree on the LEFT (LDC). This is a single drop to a large slanted ledge just before a large and very perceptible drop. Some may choose to downclimb this drop.

Follow the ledge down canyon 40 yards or so and upclimb to the obvious very stout tree above the looming precipice before you. This is the site of the ridiculous single bolt, though you may have seen some other unnecessary bolts before this one.

Rap 7: 190 feet from the very stout tree on the LEFT (LDC). This is a single drop past a beautiful cascade and falls that ends in a pool. Set the rope length or be prepared for a floating disconnect. You may notice a second single bolt at small ledge about halfway down. But since you brought your 200ft ropes and know single rope technique you can bypass this unnecessary mid-station and slide on down to the pool.

Rap 7 Alt: Rather than rapping from the tree way above, downclimb/slide into the large hanging pool. There are 2 bolts to the right of the pool that make for a nice 130' rap down to the pool below. Most of this rap is next to, but not in, the waterfall.

Rap 8: 80 feet from a small tree or pinch on the RIGHT (LDC). This is a single drop that ends in a pool. Set the rope length or be prepared for a floating disconnect. There is more unnecessary single bolt action here. Continue down canyon on the left (LDC).



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Rap 9: 190 feet from 2 bolts on the LEFT (LDC) over low angle slabs all the way to a small pothole perch at the brink of the next drop. This is a single drop. The skilled may downclimb this drop but be warned, the slabs are polished granite and very slippery.

Rap 10: 70 feet from 2 bolts on the LEFT (LDC) just outside the pothole perch. This is a single drop that lands in a dry pothole at the lip of a pool. Exit the pothole and swim the pool.

Rap 11: 150 feet from 2 bolts on the LEFT (LDC). This is a single drop that ends in a pool formed by the second dam of the trip. Set the rope length or be prepared for a floating disconnect. Exit the pool at the dam and walk over the old metal catwalk on the right (LDC) to the trail beyond.

From here you have 2 options. You can call it a day by following the trail to the right out to the obvious penstocks on the map and descending to Big Creek Rd. and your car spot (not a bad option as the best of the canyon is behind you). Or, if you are in it to win it continue downcanyon.

Rap 12: 195 feet (rope stretcher) from 2 bolts on the RIGHT (LDC) just below the start of the exit trail. This is a single drop that ends in a pool. Set the rope length or be prepared for a floating disconnect.

Continue down canyon scrambling and downclimbing through very large blocks. Progress is very slow.

Rap 13: 80 feet from a manzanita bush on the RIGHT (LDC). This is a single drop that ends in a pool. Set the rope length or be prepared for a floating disconnect.

Scramble and downclimb down canyon on the RIGHT (LDC). The bridge over Big Creek at Big Creek Rd. will come into view.

Exit:

When you see the bridge over Big Creek you will also soon notice an old road on the right (LDC) follow this road a short distance to Big Creek Rd. and your car spot.

Non-Technical:

Non-technical hikers can enjoy some wonderful and secluded swimming holes at the top of Canyon... of the Dammed. After crossing over the penstock on the approach, begin to note the numbers on each section of penstock tube. When you reach section 250 look for a small use trail descending down the slope on the left

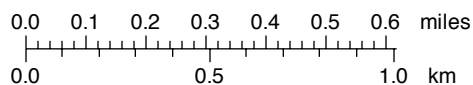
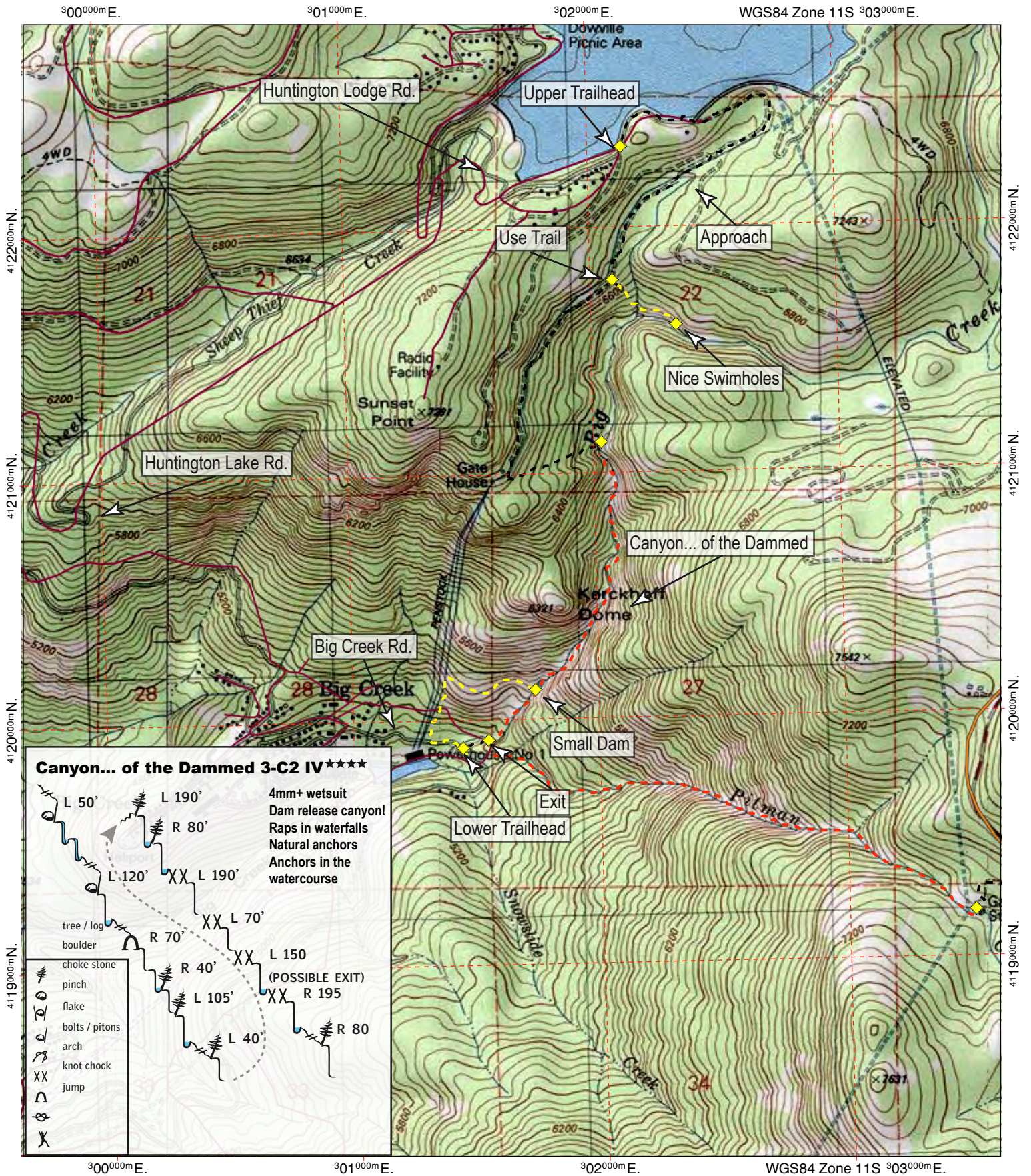
side of the road. This trail is sometimes marked with a small cairn and in 2007 there was a pile of rock debris next to the trail. You will reach this point after hiking about 1.2 miles.

Follow the use trail steeply down hill. The trail is somewhat faint and can be lost in a few places so keep your eyes peeled. The trail crosses a tributary stream, about halfway down, that may or may not be flowing. After about 0.2 miles on this trail you will see Big Creek about 200 feet below you. Continue on the trail headed upstream as it parallels Big Creek. Soon the trail will descend to the watercourse at some really nice pothole swimholes.



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13.5°
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